

quick facts

About... *HIV*

What is HIV?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). HIV damages the immune system, eventually destroying the body's ability to fight off infections and cancers. With new and improved drug treatments, HIV has become a chronic, not an acute, disease. Persons infected with HIV are able to live more normal and productive lives.

How is HIV spread?

In everyday settings, HIV is spread from one person to another through contact with one or more of the following four body fluids: blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk. These fluids have to enter a person's body in a large enough quantity to cause a problem. The main ways people become infected with HIV are:

- having unprotected sex with someone who has the virus
- sharing needles or syringes with someone who has the virus
- from infected mother to baby, during pregnancy, birth, or while breastfeeding

The virus is NOT spread from person to person by casual, everyday contact. HIV is not an airborne virus (spread in the air). Mosquitoes do not transmit HIV.

What are the symptoms of HIV infection?

A few weeks after infection, people with HIV may develop flu-like symptoms, while others may have no symptoms. Severe symptoms, which will appear much later (as long as 10 years later) and last a long time, might include fever, swollen glands, extreme tiredness, and night sweats.

It is important to note that most people with HIV do not know they have it. Individuals with HIV may look and feel healthy, yet they can infect others. HIV can be active inside your body for years before it starts to create problems.

How can I tell if I have HIV?

The only way to tell if you have HIV is by taking an HIV test. You can get an HIV test from a doctor, nurse practitioner or other health care provider, or from a counseling and testing site. For counseling and testing sites in Indiana, please visit:

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/programs/hivstd/CTS.htm>

You are at risk for HIV if you:

- Share needles and syringes
- Have unprotected sex with anyone who injects drugs
- Have unprotected sex with men who have sex with other men
- Have other sexually transmitted diseases (STD)
- Have unprotected sex with men or women

How is HIV treated?

HIV-infected persons are treated with a combination of antiretroviral medications to attack the virus from all sides. Often, with these medications, the viral level of HIV will become undetectable. This does not mean the person is "cured" or that he/she cannot transmit the virus to others.

How can I protect myself from getting HIV?

The best way to protect yourself from HIV is to avoid coming into contact with another person's blood, semen, vaginal secretions, or breast milk. Other ways to reduce your risk include:

- avoid the use of drugs and alcohol that might cause you to engage in risky behaviors
- follow the "safer sex" practices of having only one sex partner and using latex condoms or other barriers
- use clean needles if you do inject drugs
- encourage friends to follow these practices

All information presented is intended for public use. For additional information about HIV, please visit the following Web sites:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov

www.aids.gov

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